

# **FISH & WILDLIFE COMMISSION AGENDA ITEM COVER SHEET**

**Meeting Date:** May 12, 2016

**Agenda Item:** 2016 Fall Upland Game Bird Quotas and Limits

**Division:** Wildlife

**Action Needed:** Proposed

**Time Needed on Agenda for this Presentation:** 10 Min

## **Background**

Upland game bird season dates for 2016 were approved in February. Other than those changes specifically outlined below, no changes to the 2016 adopted quotas and limits are proposed.

Crossbows – The commission previously took action on allowing crossbows for taking mountain grouse and fall turkey, but that adoption did not make it into the regulations. To have crossbows included in future regulation brochures FWP proposes that crossbows be considered a legal means of taking for mountain grouse and fall turkey.

Sage grouse – Adaptive Harvest Management (AHM) for sage grouse annually assesses populations and bag limits. AHM in the final Management Plan and Conservation Strategies for Sage Grouse in Montana recommends a conservative bag limit if average lek counts are below the long-term average (LTA) and a standard limit if the average count exceeds the LTA. The Plan further prescribes a season closure if average lek counts are at least 45% below LTA for three years. Counts above the 45% closure criteria but below the LTA for three consecutive years would prompt a proposal to reopen the season as would a single year with counts above the LTA. In both instances, the closure criteria would no longer be met.

Because of heightened public awareness of sage grouse the commission adopted a conservative two-bird bag limit in 2007, which has continued through 2015, and adopted three distinct management zones for sage grouse in 2014. These zones allow for management at a scale finer than statewide. Between 2007 and 2014 lek counts declined falling below 45% of the LTA, but rebounded in 2015 to above the 45% cutoff but below LTA. Early indications for spring 2016 are that sage grouse numbers have rebounded significantly from recent lows in many areas of the state and are above last year's increase. Biologists are reporting very high male attendance on leks, but all data is not yet collected, entered and analyzed. If these encouraging preliminary findings continue, and if the number of birds on leks is above the long-term average, FWP will propose to reopen the sage grouse season in areas where it is currently closed. Lek data will be analyzed and presented to the commission at the July meeting, along with any proposal to reopen the season in any or all of the management zones.

No other changes are proposed for other upland game bird bag, possession limits and permit quotas.

## **Public Involvement Process & Results**

If approved, public comment on the proposal will run through 5 p.m., Friday, June 17, with any final adoptions at the July 14 commission meeting.

## **Alternatives and Analysis**

This proposal is based upon field observations and regional input and is consistent with statewide upland game bird management.

## **Agency Recommendation & Rationale**

FWP recommends adopting for public comment the proposed 2016 crossbow regulations and 2016 upland game bird bag and possession limits as unchanged from 2015. Bag limits for sage grouse will be revisited in July.

## **Proposed Motion**

I move that the Fish & Wildlife Commission approve for public comment the proposed 2016 crossbow regulations and 2016 upland game bird bag and possession limits as unchanged from 2015.